



Critical comments on the reports from the WHO and IAEA - Some serious contradictions and omissions -

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Previous reports from a number of governmental bodies and international organizations, including the WHO and IAEA, have not yet fully acknowledged and referenced the recent scientific studies on the effects of depleted uranium (DU), especially in its unique aspects in the case of DU weapons.

Their assessments and recommendations are based on the incomplete evaluation of the adverse effects of previous uses of the DU weapons. However, they do not answer the questions of the morality of such weapons of indiscriminate nature.

The reports from the WHO

The WHO wrote a monograph on DU, its source, exposure and health effects, in 2001¹, together with some related short reports up to 2003².

The reports from WHO including their most recent view which was submitted to the UN Secretary General in June 2008³, at least to some extent, dealt with environmental contamination in areas where DU munitions were used. They recognized that “people living or working in affected areas may inhale re-suspended contaminated dusts” and recommended monitoring of DU contamination and possible decontamination operations, and included warnings about young children’s possible ingestion of contaminated soil.

However, the reports and views have some serious contradictions and omissions as listed below. ***It is not right to rely on those reports, without considering these contradictions and omissions, especially when we discuss the questions of continuous use of such weapons or support to the affected countries and people.***

¹ WHO, Department of Protection of Human Environment, Depleted uranium: Sources, Exposure and Health Effects, Geneva, April 2001.

² The most recent fact sheet on DU was devised 2003, which is available at: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs257/en/>

³ UN General Assembly 63rd session, [A/63/170]; Effects of the use of armaments and ammunitions containing depleted uranium, Report of the Secretary-General, pp.22-24

1. They did not consider the unique aspects of DU nano-particles or the mixture of DU particles with several other toxic metals in the DU aerosol as created through the use of DU weapons. The other metals in the DU aerosol are also toxic.
2. They mainly focus on the radiological toxicity to the lungs and the chemical toxicity to the kidneys, which came from the study of uranium miners and nuclear industry workers.
3. They did not fully reference the most up-to-date peer-reviewed papers from 2001. From a scientific point of view, it is really unreasonable that they do not even mention anything at least about the carcinogenic and mutagenic effects of DU, though we already have sufficient evidence of them from recent experimental studies. They wrote in their most recent view which has been submitted to the UN Secretary General, that they will update the monograph in 2008 and “New evidence from recent epidemiological and experimental studies will be reviewed, however, no major deviation from previous conclusions is expected.”⁴ Nobody could say such a preconception, if they are real scientists, without seriously reviewing the studies. No credible scientist would make such a prejudgment about scientific studies. In that sense, their statement here is quite political rather than scientific.
4. Although they realized its importance, they have not yet fully assessed the risk to children or pregnant women, who may be more sensitive to DU contamination.
5. They have estimated radiation doses using the model of the ICRP, the International Commission on Radiological Protection, and have accepted the risks based on the International Basic Safety Standards (BSS). However, this idea of risk assessment is based on the “risk-benefit theory”, which can never apply to the risk assessment of weapons. In the case of DU weapons, the affected people will never enjoy the benefit from them. Note that the ICRP extended the respiratory model to include nano-particles without any scientific explanation only after Gulf War I. This is disputed.
6. They emphasized that there were still uncertainties in the assessment of the health effects of DU and that we do not yet have enough evidence in human study. However, they did not consider the “precautionary principle” in making their recommendations regarding the need to avoid any further contamination and deleterious health effects of DU, which could result from the continuous use of DU weapons.
7. They stated that “the general screening or monitoring for possible DU related health effects in the populations in the affected areas is not necessary.”⁵ Such an attitude is in complete contradiction to the basic task of the WHO, which is to protect the public from environmental hazards and to prevent disease.

⁴ Ibid, p. 23

⁵ Footnote 1, Executive Summary, vii

The view from the IAEA

As for the IAEA's assessment of the effects on health and environment, we can make the same arguments that are made against WHO listed above in the items 1-5. They performed the evaluation of the environmental and health impact of DU weapons in the affected areas together with UNEP and WHO. They did not actually "evaluate the impact of depleted uranium ammunition on the troops or the populations at the time of the conflicts"⁶ due to failure to monitor air quality during the battle, though the exposure might be more serious during the time of bombing. Moreover, not clinical studies of veterans or civilians were undertaken.

The IAEA recommended to the national authorities, in all the cases studied "to collect any depleted uranium ammunition or fragments and any war equipment which have been in direct contact with these ammunitions and isolate them from the public in appropriate locations until it can be processed as low level radioactive waste and eventually safely disposed of."⁷ In reality, the governments of affected countries reported that they have been making efforts for such decontamination but are still having great difficulties in fully carrying out the required decontamination.

IAEA mentioned that "Some environmental remedial actions like covering of areas with uncontaminated soils could be convenient at some particular locations, depending on the use of the land."⁸ This proposal is extremely unscientific since it would only hide serious problems like contamination of the ground water and uptake by vegetables and fruits.

"IAEA generally concluded that the radiological risk was not significant and could be controlled with simple countermeasures conducted by national authorities."⁹ By this statement, IAEA blocks international aid to the affected countries and peoples, and fails to provide meaningful medical and physical help.

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⁶ Footnote 3, p. 21

⁷ Ibid, p. 22

⁸ Ibid. p. 22

⁹ Ibid. p. 22